



## News Advisory

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### UDOH and Safety Net Providers Look at Ways to Help the Uninsured and Underinsured in Utah

(Salt Lake City, Utah) – In 2005, about one in four Utahns could not get health care. They were either too poor or unable to access health care due to geographic, culture, and language barriers. Fortunately, some of them received care through Safety Net, a system of community health clinics and non-profit groups that provide essential services to the uninsured and underinsured.

The Utah Department of Health and Safety Net health care providers met today to discuss the contributions providers are making to those most in need. They are also working together to find ways to strengthen the system.

“We’re aware that there is a problem, but a little-known system is trying to address the problem in a different way,” said Dr. Marc Babitz, director of the Division of Health Systems Improvement, UDOH. “Many well-meaning and hard-working health care providers are contributing to the health and well-being of their fellow Utahns, and they are doing it on marginal budgets.”

The UDOH estimates that in 2005, 292,800 (11.6 percent) Utahns did not have health care insurance and another 310,000 (13.9 percent) insured Utahns had a problem accessing health care. To find out more about the uninsured and the underinsured using Safety Net, the UDOH recently conducted a survey among Safety Net health care providers. It collected data for the first quarter of 2006. About 40 percent of Safety Net clinics voluntarily participated in the survey. Preliminary results, released at today’s meeting, indicate that:

- There were 18,868 visits to Safety Net providers.
- Almost half of the visits were for a chronic condition.
- Women (56 percent) visited a provider more than men (44 percent).

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- 27 percent of patients were children age 18 and under; 3 percent were adults age 65 and older.
- 47 percent of patients were white; 45 percent were Hispanic; 53 percent spoke Spanish as their primary language.
- 69 percent of patients lived below the poverty level; 27 percent did not know their poverty level.
- Over half of the visits were considered self-pay, which meant that patients had no means to cover health care expenses and paid what they could.
- 36 percent of patients had public insurance such as Medicare and Medicaid.

“The survey confirms what we strongly suspected — Safety Net is making a significant contribution to the health care of Utahns,” Dr. Babitz said. “Now that we have this data, we can move forward in finding ways to strengthen the system so that more of Utah’s underinsured and uninsured can get the health care they need.”

For a list of community health clinics, please visit the Association for Utah Community Health at [www.auch.org](http://www.auch.org) or call Bobbie Lou Anderson at (801) 538-6659.

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*The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.*